



1<sup>st</sup> March 2006

The Secretary,  
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the  
Arts References Committee,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senate Secretary,

The tourism industry in Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) appreciates the Senates initiative in reviewing our National Parks. The tourism industry in TNQ is based entirely on nature and natural assets and as such access to, and the conditions of, protected areas are critical to sustaining this vital component to our regional economy, with land-based tourism in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area are valued at \$700 million alone.

The industry has in the past had a fractious relationship with protected area managers largely due to a perception (real or imagined) that our issues were not seen as important by this group. However, over the past few years the industry has led a process to create better communication structures and more effective working relationships with protected area managers. We are now starting to see the fruits of this labour albeit on relatively minor local matters. The big ticket items such as funding, role of users pays, private/public partnerships on protected areas and exclusive access generally require major changes in Government policy at the State or Federal level and at present there appears to be a lack of structure within Governments to address these issues effectively.

The lack of this structure has led to a denigration of the environment and the sustainability of the industry. One example (among many) of this is the Daintree region. This region 25 years ago was a niche wilderness experience. With the creation of the Bloomfield to Cape Tribulation road and the associated media interest generated by protestors, the Daintree became an international ecotourism icon. This drove demand for tours to the area and the Daintree became the regions leading day tour destination. The increase of tours led to the upgrading of roads from dirt track to fully sealed. This then allowed easy access to conventional motor vehicles and significantly larger numbers of Free and Independent Travellers. 10 years ago the ratio was 70:30 tour groups to FITs, today this ratio is reversed. The increased number of FITs led to protected area managers developing hardened day use facilities. The outcomes:

- For tour operators - a much reduced wilderness experience and reduction in prices and loads due to competition from car hires - an average day tour to the Daintree is \$120.00 per person while 4 persons can hire a vehicle plus fuel for around a total of \$80.

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- For the local economy - lower yields from visitors - tour groups use local guides and food and beverage suppliers and encourage passengers to purchase unique local products. FITs tend to come supplied with food and drink and are often unaware of things they could do while in the area. It is their tendency to rush to Cape Tribulation then head back.
- For protected area managers - congestion at peak times in hardened areas, lack of control of visitors (tour groups are fully supervised at all times) causing damage and raising safety issues, increase road kills of keystone species such as the Cassowary, increased costs in providing and servicing visitor facilities with no way to charging the visitor.

This scenario is not unique to this region - the situation on Fraser Island is almost identical. The local industry through the Alliance for Sustainable Tourism has reached agreement with both Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service and Wet Tropics Management Authority to create a planning policy to ensure that this situation is avoided in the future. The Palmerston area (south of Cairns) has been identified as an area of significant potential for tourism over the next ten years. The Alliance is currently working with protected area managers and researchers to use this as a case study for the new planning policy.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite members of the Senate Committee to come to the region to look at what is being developed and, more importantly, work with us on some of the bigger issues that might impede the implementation of our efforts. If this is seen of value to the Committee's endeavours, I would recommend a full day field trip and evening workshop.

Yours sincerely,

*Steve Olle*

Steve Olle  
Chairman

Cc. The Honourable Warren Entsch, Federal Member for Leichhardt

Senator Jann McLucas, Senator for Queensland

The Honourable Desley Boyle, Minister for Environment, Local Government,  
Planning & Women

Councillor Jason O'Brien, Member for Cook